



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Rotavirus

What is rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a disease caused by a virus. It is the most common cause of gastroenteritis (inflammation of the stomach and intestines) in infants and young children in the world. The virus causes severe watery diarrhea, vomiting, and fever. Before the rotavirus vaccine, almost all children in the US were infected with the virus before their fifth birthday, resulting in over 55,000 hospitalizations annually and 20 and 60 deaths per year.

What are the symptoms of rotavirus?

Rotavirus disease is most common in infants and young children, but adults and older children can also become infected with rotavirus. Once a person has been exposed to rotavirus, it takes about 2 days for symptoms to appear.

Symptoms include

- Fever
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal pain

Vomiting and watery diarrhea may last from 3 to 8 days. Additional symptoms include loss of appetite and dehydration (loss of body fluids).

There are many different types of rotavirus and people may become infected with this virus more than once. The vaccine protects children from getting severe rotavirus disease. Children who are vaccinated may develop mild disease if exposed to rotavirus, but are unlikely to require medical care or hospitalization.

How is rotavirus spread?

People can spread the virus both before and after they become sick. They can also pass rotavirus to family members and other people with whom they have close contact.

Rotavirus is passed from a person's body into the environment in feces (stool) of infected people. The virus must be passed from an infected person and then enter a person's mouth to cause infection.

Rotavirus can be spread by:

- Hands
- Objects (toys, surfaces)
- Food
- Water

Who is at risk for rotavirus?

People at increased risk for rotavirus infection are those with the most exposure to the virus. These include children who attend child care centers, children in hospital wards, caretakers and parents of children in child care or hospitals, and children and adults with weakened immune systems.

How do I know if I have rotavirus?

See your doctor. Your doctor may test your stool for the virus. Many other diseases can cause illnesses similar to that caused by rotavirus.

How is rotavirus treated?

Since rotavirus is caused by a virus, antibiotics do not cure rotavirus. There are no medications used to treat rotavirus. Diarrhea and vomiting caused by rotavirus leads to severe dehydration (loss of body fluids) and hospitalization in 1 out of every 65 unvaccinated children who get the disease. Rotavirus vaccine is very good protection against severe disease requiring hospitalization.

How is rotavirus prevented?

Rotavirus can spread easily among infants and young children. While hand washing is an important way to stop the spread of germs, it is not enough to stop rotavirus. The best way to protect children against rotavirus is to get them vaccinated on time. The rotavirus vaccine is safe and is part of the vaccine schedule for infants. Ask your doctor about getting the rotavirus vaccine for your baby.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/rotavirus/index.html>.

This page was last reviewed April 3, 2013.